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Viewing cable 05BEIRUT3155, MGLE1 MURR POINTS FINGER AT SYRIA AND REVEALS

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#05BEIRUT3155**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05BEIRUT3155	2005-09-28 15:44	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/POUNDS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/30/2015
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE1 MURR POINTS FINGER AT SYRIA AND REVEALS
EXTENT OF SYRIAN THREATS IN LEBANON

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reasons Section 1.4 (a) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: At least until the 7/12 assassination attempt against him, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Elias Murr was always seen locally as an insider's insider during the Syrian occupation. His credentials seemed perfect: son-in-law of President Lahoud, son of a prominent pro-Syrian "political boss" Michel Murr, and supposed contact of Syria's pro-Consul in Lebanon, Rustom Ghazaleh. But in an unexpected 9/28 public revelation, Murr outed himself as a victim of Syrian gangsterism. During a television interview with Telecom Minister Marwan Hamadeh, Murr called into the station from Zurich and openly said that Ghazaleh threatened him for Murr's role in bringing accused terrorists to justice. This revelation became the talk of Lebanon. One of the presumed insiders admitted what Lebanese have always said, that Syria used the threats readily as a tool to ensure their orders were obeyed. President Lahoud followed his son-in-law Murr's statement with a statement of his own praising past and present ties with Syria. Now Murr's experience may open up new areas of inquiry for the UNIIIC investigation under Detlev Mehliis. Meanwhile, Beirut socialites gossip that Murr's marriage to Lahoud's daughter is collapsing. End summary.

MURR GOES PUBLIC

¶2. (C) During a LBC interview with Marwan Hamadeh -- himself victim of a terrorist bomb widely believed to have

been planned by Syria -- Elias Murr called in to the program from Zurich to second Hamadeh's televised comment that Murr knew the author of the 7/12 attack against him. Murr explained that a problem had developed between Murr and Syrian Military Intelligence representative in Lebanon Rustom Ghazaleh in the wake of September 2004 arrests of suspects in the attempt to place a bomb at the Italian Embassy in Beirut.

(Note: While Murr never actually said Ghazaleh's name on TV, it was crystal clear from the context that Ghazaleh was the subject of Murr's accusations.)

13. (C) According to Murr, Ghazaleh called Said Eid, commander of the police and ordered him to call Murr and give him a "tongue lashing." Murr reacted to the call by calling Ghazaleh directly and protesting his use of Eid to criticize him. Murr reports that Eid, who overheard the conversation with Ghazaleh, told Murr, it is time for you to pack your bags and go home. Subsequent to this conversation, Murr said, he learned of threats to his life and left Lebanon for security reasons. For Murr, the attempted murder of May Chidiac was the final straw leading him to make his public revelation. Murr ended his intervention on the program by saying, "now we are all alike." When the Ambassador spoke with Murr by phone the following day, Murr said that he felt greatly relieved that a great burden had been lifted from his chest. But he joked that, between angering the Syrians and his own father-in-law, he might become a permanent resident of Zurich.

MURR PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED PRO-SYRIAN

14. (C) On July 12, 2005 Elias Murr narrowly escaped an attempt on his life when a bomb blast destroyed his car and killed one of his bodyguards. The explosion caused more surprise than usual because no one had expected Murr to be a target. Unlike the previous victims of attacks -- Hamadeh, Rafiq Hariri, Samir Kassir, George Hawi -- Murr had always appeared to be a staunch supporter of Syria, always backing father-in-law Emile Lahoud in his pro-Syrian stance. Local pundits searched for a way to explain the attempt on Murr's life. Some pointed at Israel for Murr's defense of the resistance. Others, less given to ideological views thought Murr might be the victim of a Palestinian/Sunni extremist strike for his handling of extremists in the wake of the attempted bombing of the Italian embassy. Few could believe that Syria would strike against an old ally like Murr.

MURR VS. LAHOUD

15. (C) The Murr bombshell was followed yesterday by a statement from his father-in-law, President Lahoud. Lahoud used his first public speech since the attempt on May Chidiac's life to praise the Syrian-Lebanese relationship. Lahoud held out the past cooperation with Syria as a model to be emulated by others. Lahoud's statement, given to local journalists, is seen as a direct attack on Murr. Syrian sources quickly claimed Murr's description of events was a complete fabrication. Meanwhile, Beirut socialites spread gossip that Elias Murr's marriage with Lahoud's daughter has irrevocably broken down, although people dispute whether the marital problems provoked or stemmed from Murr's surprise revelations.

COMMENT -- WHY NOW?

15. (C) Murr's revelation about Syria is not unexpected. Privately, Murr has always maintained that Syria threatened and pressured him. His public statements on LBC mirror what he has told us earlier. However, Murr chose his moment well. Speaking on a popular program on the network identified with May Chidiac, during a broadcast interview with Marwan Hamadeh gave extra weight to his words. That Rafiq Hariri was threatened by the Syrians before his death is taken as an article of faith here. That belief is supported by Murr's story of a Syrian supporter who ran afoul of Damascus. The

old-style Lahoud statement that followed illustrated dramatically how isolated the President has become from his people and from reality. Even with all the dissenting voices around him, Emil Lahoud still manages to be his own worst enemy.

¶6. (C) But there is probably also a self-serving aspect to Murr's timing. During UNIIIC Commissioner Detlev Mehlis' probe, Murr's name surfaced briefly as a potential target of the lifting of bank secrecy laws. While Murr seems to have no connection with Hariri's murder -- which took place when Murr was living in Zurich in the aftermath of the September 2004 threats to his life -- he is rumored to have been linked by financial corruption to the four Lebanese generals now in custody. If the GOL decides to probe into the corruption related to the notorious Bank al-Medina collapse, Murr will most likely be implicated over some shady real estate deals. He may be calculating that the sympathy he wins for being a victim of Syrian aggression will help salvage his reputation if the Bank al-Medina secrets are revealed. End comment.

FELTMAN